

Extension Cares... for America's Children and Youth

THE NATIONAL EXTENSION “CARES” ...FOR AMERICA’S CHILDREN AND YOUTH INITIATIVE

Over the course of their developmental years, the majority of American children and youth will spend more time in childcare, after-school care, and teen out-of-school settings than in formal education. Research has demonstrated that quality out-of-home settings lead to more positive outcomes for children and youth, which, in turn, can positively affect the larger societal issues of educational attainment, employment, the economy and the environment. Unfortunately, national studies show that many of these programs are poor to mediocre. This situation must be addressed to ensure the future well being of our children and youth, families, communities, and nation. Caring...for America’s children and youth is everyone’s business, and everyone benefits. In 1999, the national Extension “CARES”...for America’s Children and Youth Initiative (ECI) was added to the list of USDA Cooperative Extension System national initiatives by the Extension Committee on Policy in order to address this critical societal issue. The vision, mission, goals, and objectives to be achieved through the initiative are listed below.

- **Vision:** All children and youth are in safe, healthy, caring, and enriching environments when they are away from their parents.
- **Mission:** To improve childcare, school-age care and teen out-of-school settings by linking the teaching, research, outreach education, technology, and 4-H youth development resources of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 105 land-grant universities and 3,150 county Cooperative Extension offices to local communities across America.
- **Overall Goal:** To increase the quality, availability, accessibility, affordability, and sustainability of child care, school-age care and teen out-of-school programs.
- **Sub-Goals:** The four major sub-goals of the ECI are listed below. Sub-Goals #1 and #2 pertain to child care, school-age care and teen out-of-school staff and programs. Sub-Goal #3 focuses on the family while Sub-Goal #4 relates to the community. Specific objectives to be achieved in each of these four areas are listed under each sub-goal on the following pages.
 - **Sub-Goal #1.** Improve the ability of program staff* and home-based providers to offer high quality care, education and developmental experiences for children and youth.
 - **Sub-Goal #2.** Improve the quality of childcare, school-age care and teen out-of-school settings.
 - **Sub-Goal #3.** Improve the ability of families to better support their children in out-of-home programs.
 - **Sub-Goal #4.** Improve community and state supports for programs.

**Program staff refers to administrators and staff in childcare, school-age care and teen out-of-school programs.*